

Message Text

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ORIGIN ARA-14

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SUBJECT: ARTICLE APPEARING IN WASHINGTON STAR - APRIL
8, 1978

FOLLOWING IS AN ARTICLE APPEARING IN THE WASHINGTON STAR
SATURDAY, APRIL 8, 1978:

QUOTE:

PUBLIC POSTERING AND HAM-HANDED LOBBYING EFFORTS BY PANAMA-
MANIAN OFFICIALS ARE THREATENING TO UNRAVEL THE SLIM
MAJORITY IN THE SENATE ON RECORD IN SUPPORT OF THE NEW
PANAMA CANAL TREATIES.

CONTRARY TO SOME PUBLIC INTERPRETATIONS, PANAMA HAS NOT
SAID THAT IT WILL REJECT THE TREATIES, DESPITE ITS
DISPLEASURE WITH A NUMBER OF CHANGES MADE IN THE AGREE-
MENTS BY THE SENATE.

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YESTERDAY, IN FACT, THE PANAMANIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY SOUGHT
TO CORRECT ANY IMPRESSION THAT THE LEADER OF THE COUNTRY,
BRIG. GEN. OMAR TORRIJOS, ALREADY HAD DECIDED, UNDER
POLITICAL PRESSURE AT HOME, TO REJECT THE CANAL AGREEMENT
ON WHICH THE SENATE HAS ACTED -- THE TREATY PROVIDING
FOR THE NEUTRALITY OF THE WATERWAY AFTER IT IS CEDED BY THE
UNITED STATES.

A DECISION TO WITHHOLD JUDGMENT UNTIL THE SENATE COMPLETES
ITS WORK ON THE PACTS "CONTINUES TO BE THE OFFICIAL POSI-

TION OF THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT," THE MINISTRY SAID IN A STATEMENT RELAYED BY ITS EMBASSY HERE.

IT REMAINS POSSIBLE THAT TORRIJOS' GOVERNMENT MAY ULTIMATELY REJECT THE TREATIES AS POLITICALLY UNPALATABLE, BUT THUS FAR, AS YESTERDAY'S STATEMENT MADE CLEAR, IT HAS NOT.

PERHAPS UNWITTINGLY, HOWEVER, TORRIJOS, HIS AMBASSADOR TO WASHINGTON, GABRIEL LEWIS, AND OTHER PANAMANIAN OFFICIALS MAY BE RUNNING THE RISK OF KILLING AGREEMENTS IN WASHINGTON WITH THEIR PUBLIC AND PRIVATE GRUMBLINGS ABOUT SENATE-ADDED PROVISIONS.

THE FLAP THAT HAS SPRUNG UP THIS WEEK OVER LETTERS SENT BY TORRIJOS TO THE HEADS OF STATE OF SOME 100 OTHER NATIONS THAT TAKE EXCEPTION TO THE SO-CALLED "DECONCINI RESERVATION" MERELY IS THE LATEST ACTION THAT HAS STRAINED RELATIONS BETWEEN PANAMA AND TREATY SUPPORTERS IN THE UNITED STATES.

CARTER ADMINISTRATION OFFICIALS, TRYING TO HOLD TOGETHER THE WAFER-THIN MAJORITY THAT LAST MONTH APPROVED THE UNCLASSIFIED

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FIRST TO TWO CANAL TREATIES, ALSO HAS HAD TO CONTEND RECENTLY WITH AN IMPROMPTU LOBBYING EFFORT BY LEWIS THAT REPORTEDLY ANGERED SOME MEMBERS OF THE SENATE.

LEWIS, ACCORDING TO SOURCES, TELEPHONED A NUMBER OF SENATORS TO PROTEST AGAINST THE DECONCINI PROVISION AND TO WARN THAT PANAMA MIGHT NOT ACCEPT FURTHER ALTERATIONS IN THE TREATIES.

THE DECONCINI RESERVATION, NAMED FOR ITS SPONSOR, SEN. DENNIS DECONCINI, D-ARIZ., WAS INTENDED TO GUARANTEE THAT THE UNITED STATES COULD UNILATERALLY INTERVENE IN PANAMA IF IT BECOME NECESSARY TO GUARANTEE CONTINUED OPERATION OF THE CANAL.

ADOPTION OF THE CHANGE BECAME NECESSARY TO WIN THE TWO-THIRDS MAJORITY NEEDED FOR SENATE APPROVAL OF THE NEUTRALITY TREATY LAST MONTH. THE ADDITION OF THE RESERVATION INFURIATED MANY PANAMANIAN, HOWEVER, AND THE TORRIJOS GOVERNMENT, IN TURN, EVIDENTLY HAS FELT COMPELLED TO OBJECT TO THE PROVISION.

ALTHOUGH THEY EXPRESS UNDERSTANDING OF PANAMA'S DISPLEASURE WITH THE CHANGE, STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS AND LEADING TREATY SUPPORTERS IN THE SENATE HAVE BECOME CONCERNED ABOUT THE RESPONSE BY THE TORRIJOS AND OTHER PANAMANIAN OFFICIALS. BOTH LEWIS' LOBBYING VENTURES

AND THE TORRIJOS LETTER TO THE HEADS OF STATE CAUGHT WASHINGTON BY SURPRISE.

THREATS OF DEMONSTRATIONS IN PANAMA AGAINST PROVISIONS OF THE NEUTRALITY TREATY HAVE FUELED THE CONSTERNATION OF PRO-TREATY FORCES ON CAPITOL HILL.

IN REMARKS IN HOUSTON THURSDAY NIGHT, SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER HOWARD H. BAKER, A KEY TREATY SUPPORTER, PUBLICALLY UNCLASSIFIED

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WARNED PANAMA THAT IT WAS FLIRTING WITH DANGER WITH ITS RECENT MANEUVERING.

"I THINK OUR FRIENDS IN PANAMA OUGHT TO KNOW," SAID THE TENNESSEE REPUBLICAN "THAT THE SLIGHTEST TWITCH OF AN EYELID, JUST THE SLIGHTEST PROVOCATION OR EXPRESSION OF THIS TREATY, IN THIS FORM, IS NOT ACCEPTABLE AND THIS WHOLE THING COULD GO DOWN THE TUBE."

PRIVATELY, ADMINISTRATION OFFICIALS WERE SOUNDING THE SAME ADMONITION. "THESE TACTICS HAVE THE POSSIBILITY OF SCREWING RELATIONS UP FOR THE NEXT GENERATION," ONE PRO-TREATY SOURCE SAID YESTERDAY.

ALTHOUGH NOTING THAT THE TORRIJOS LETTER DID NOT GO BEYOND EARLIER PANAMANIAN COMPLAINTS ABOUT THE DECONCINI PROVISION, THIS OFFICIAL SAID THE TIMING OF THE MESSAGE DEMONSTRATED "SUBSTANTIAL BAD JUDGMENT" BY THE CENTRAL AMERICAN STRONGMAN.

LEWIS' LOBBYING EFFORTS, CHARACTERIZED BY ONE SOURCE AS "VERY HARD-LINE," WERE ALSO SEEN BY THIS AND OTHER ADMINISTRATION OFFICIALS AS POTENTIALLY DAMAGING.

"IF THEY GET INTO THE LOBBYING BUSINESS, SOME DAMAGE CAN BE DONE; IN FACT, SOME DAMAGE HAS ALREADY BEEN DONE," SAID ONE SOURCE.

THUS FAR, THERE IS NO HARD EVIDENCE THAT SUPPORT FOR THE CANAL TREATIES HAS BEEN ERODED PERMANENTLY.

BUT AS AN EXAMPLE OF THE TYPE OF BACKLASH ADMINISTRATION OFFICIALS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT, DECONCINI HAS SUGGESTED UNCLASSIFIED

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THAT IN LIGHT OF TORRIJOS' LETTER, HE MAY MAKE PUBLIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENT BY PANAMA OF U.S. INTERVENTION RIGHTS A PRICE FOR HIS VOTE ON THE FINAL CANAL AGREEMENT.

SUCH A DEMAND, STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS BELIEVE, WOULD NEVER BE MET BY PANAMA.

ASSISTANT SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER TED STEVENS, A TREATY OPPONENT, SAID YESTERDAY THAT HE WOULD "BE VERY SURPRISED IF TORRIJOS' LATEST TACTIC DOESN'T CHANGE SOME VOTES" AGAINST THE TREATIES.

THE NEUTRALITY AGREEMENT WAS APPROVED LAST MONTH ON A VOTE OF 68-32, A MARGIN OF ONE OVER THE CONSTITUTIONALLY PRESCRIBED TWO-THIRDS MAJORITY REQUIRED FOR TREATY RATIFICATION.

THE STATE DEPARTMENT IS SAID TO HAVE CONVEYED TO TORRIJOS THE POTENTIAL SERIOUSNESS OF HIS RECENT ACTIONS, COUPLED WITH A REMINDER THAT THE CUSHION OF SENATE SUPPORT FOR THE TREATIES CURRENTLY IS VERY THIN.

THE STATEMENT ISSUED BY THE FOREIGN MINISTRY YESTERDAY WAS SEEN AS A RESPONSE TO THE U.S. PRESSURE. ACCORDING TO ADMINISTRATION SOURCES, TORRIJOS ALSO HAS BEEN ADVISED TO MUZZLE HIS AMBASSADOR DURING THE TWO WEEKS REMAINING BEFORE THE SENATE IS SCHEDULED TO VOTE ON THE FINAL CANAL PACT, THE ONE THAT ACTUALLY WOULD TURN THE WATERWAY OVER TO PANAMA.

"THE BEST PLACE FOR AMBASSADOR LEWIS DURING THE NEXT TWO WEEKS IS IN HIS EMBASSY," ONE TREATY SUPPORTER SAID YESTERDAY.

ALSO AS PART OF THE EFFORT TO REPAIR THE DAMAGE THAT MAY UNCLASSIFIED

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HAVE BEEN DONE, DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE WARREN CHRISTOPHER SCHEDULED A MEETING WITH DECONCINI LATE YESTERDAY TO EXPLAIN THE POSSIBLE RAMIFICATIONS IF THE ARIZONA DEMOCRAT IMPOSES NEW DEMANDS ON PANAMA.

A SPOKESMAN FOR THE SENATOR SAID BEFORE THE MEETING THAT DECONCINI RECOGNIZED THE SENSITIVITY OF THE DIPLOMATIC SITUATION AND THAT HE WAS ATTEMPTING TO AVOID EXACERBATING THE PROBLEM WITH FURTHER PUBLIC DECLARATIONS.

THE AIDE ADDED, HOWEVER, THAT DECONCINI VIEWED TORRIJOS' ACTIONS AS "CREATING A CLOUD" OVER THE PROSPECT FOR TREATY RATIFICATION. "IF HE CREATES A BIG ENOUGH CLOUD, HE'S GOING TO LOSE SOME VOTES," HE SAID.

UNQUOTE. VANCE

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